Ontario
Ministry of
Community and
Social Services

Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1E9

August 8, 1983

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

to

Deputy-Minister, Mr. Robert M. McDonald

of

Report on the Investigation into

the Role of Mrs. June Lasenby,
Alderman of the City of Sarnia,

the Role of the Board of Directors
of the Sarnia/Lambton Children's Aid
Society,

and the Validity of Allegations of
mis-management made by certain clients
of the Society.

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During the Spring and early Summer of 1983 the Sarnia/Lambton Children's Aid Society became the subject of Province-wide publicity and criticism. Accusations of mis-management were made by angry parents and by one of the Society's Board members, the elected representative from the City of Sarnia, Mrs. June Lasenby.

Alderman Lasenby was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Sarnia/Lambton Society in the Fall of 1982 and took her seat in January of 1983. She was dismissed from the Board under the Corporations Act on May 31st, 1983 at the meeting of the general membership of the Society. The Board of the C.A.S. subsequently submitted a formal request to City Council to rescind Mrs. Lasenby's appointment to the Board. The Council in turn passed a resolution to defer the decision until advice had been received from the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Honourable Mr. Frank Drea. The Minister appointed Mr. John Packer, and Mrs. B.J. James to conduct an investigation. This was carried out between June 27th and July 14th, 1983, and an additional three weeks were spent on follow-up work.

The methodology of the inquiry was to consider only those complaints brought to the attention of the review team, and limited to matters covered by The Child Welfare Act. The team made every effort to conduct personal interviews with all individuals involved in the complaints under consideration. Also, all other individuals who might have had an interest in the specific matters being reviewed were invited to make appointments for interviews.

The investigators spent approximately three weeks in Sarnia and the surrounding area, interviewing clients, community professionals, elected representatives, foster parents and Directors of the Board - a total of 37 individuals.

THE ROLE OF ALDERMAN LASENBY

The role of an individual member of the Board is well documented in the Board members' handbook produced by the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and routinely made available to each Director of the Sarnia Children's Aid Society. In addition, an information kit outlining the management structure, the nature of the services, and other salient information is provided. Most Board members of Corporations which provide social services in this Province carry out their responsibilities through the respective Committees of the Board to which they have been elected or appointed.

Alderman Lasenby, however -- albeit, through the best of intentions -- assumed an inappropriate role as a board member.

Mrs. Lasenby initially became involved with a client of the Society in her capacity as an alderman in June of 1982. The records show that she ably and successfully assisted this family throughout a status review of Crown Wardship and continued assisting the family to carry on a normal family life.

After Alderman Lasenby took her seat on the Board of the Society on February 5th, 1983 until June 16th, 1983, she had personal contact and carried out "case work activities" with thirteen different clients. These activities ranged from visiting a ward in Secure Detention, attending at Children's Psychiatric Research Institute, London, Ontario, and questioning a psychiatrist about a child in care, to visiting a client's home during a child abuse investigation. In addition, on May 4th, 1983, Mrs. Lasenby, together with another person who had been notified by the Local Director in writing that access to a ward was being denied under Section 46(d) of The Child Welfare Act, visited and interviewed the child at her school.

On April 21st, 1983, Alderman Lasenby gave five names of dissatisfied clients to the Ministry Program Supervisor without mentioning specific complaints. On May 5th, the Program Supervisor received another eight names.

Clearly, Alderman Lasenby's early advocacy activities on behalf of the Society's clients would be completely acceptable in her capacity as an alderman. Later, however, as a member of the Board, her intervention and inappropriate personal involvement in the Society's mandated investigations and service activities became totally unacceptable. The time spent by the Board in dealing with Mrs. Lasenby's allegations prevented it from carrying out is normal activities. In addition, confidential Board matters and client information became public knowledge.

The Board took action through a meeting of the general membership on May 31st, 1983, and dismissed Mrs. Lasenby from the Board.

In the opinion of the Ministry's Legal Services Branch, neither the Board, nor the membership of the Society has authority to dismiss a member of the Board of Directors who has been appointed by a municipality under Section 7 of The Child Welfare Act.

The investigators strongly recommend that the Minister, however, support a request by the Board of Directors of the Sarnia/Lambton Children's Aid Society to the Sarnia City Council to have Mrs. Lasenby removed as the representative on the Board of Directors for the following reasons.

1. Alderman Lasenby violated her fiduciary relationship to the Corporation when she publicly took an adversarial position vis-a-vis the Society.

2. Alderman Lasenby's presence at child abuse investigations made it impossible for the Society staff to carry out its mandate under The Child Welfare Act.

3. Alderman Lasenby violated the policy on confidentiality by mentioning the name of a ward of the Society on the air.

4. Alderman Lasenby acted contrary to Section 46(d), of The Child Welfare Act by accompanying a person to interview a ward at school against the orders of the Local Director. The Local Director is the person responsible for the administration and the enforcement of The Child Welfare Act, (Section 4(1)), not an individual member of the Board.

5. Confidential matters discussed by the Board of Directors had become public knowledge.

6. The Board, because of time spent on controversial matters raised by Alderman Lasenby, has been hampered in carrying out its normal, legislative duties.

ROLE OF THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

In addition to the examination of the controversy between the Children's Aid Society Board and the City Alderman, the investigators were asked by the Deputy Minister to ascertain through personal interviews with clients and a review of all files and relevant documents the validity, if any, of Alderman Lasenby's allegations regarding mis-management of cases.

Thirteen such cases had been identified earlier to the Ministry staff. Alderman Lasenby added three more names to the list and agreed to refer all other complainants to the Children's Aid Society for processing through the newly established complaint procedure.

The arrival of the Ministry investigators in Sarnia was well publicized in all local media. The team was introduced to a group representing natural and foster parents at the meeting of the Children's Aid Society Board on June 28th. Several individuals made personal appointments at that time while all others were contacted by telephone. One person could not be located and one family stated that it no longer had any concerns. In two cases the clients later telephoned and cancelled their appointments and in two other cases the complainants refused to be interviewed.

Personal interviews were held with eight families, either in the clients' homes or in the Ministry office, according to the wishes of the complainants. One client was interviewed by long distance telephone. The team permitted clients to record the proceedings and take notes. All interviews with complainants were conducted with both investigators present taking separate notes.

Reviews of case management files were conducted by B.J. James at the office of the Children's Aid Society. Interviews were held with front-line staff, supervisors, foster parents, the Society solicitor, and the Local Director. The files of the complainants who declined personal interviews were reviewed as well. John Packer interviewed a number of persons in the community and checked radio tapes, and pertinent documents. All relevant documentation in the possession of the Ministry personnel in Windsor was examined.

A confidential detailed report on eleven case reviews was submitted to the Deputy Minister. No further specific details can be given, in order to protect the confidentiality of the clients.

In summary, the team had no concerns about the case management in four cases. The team had only very minor concens regarding communication with the clients in two cases. In two cases, the actual complaints by the clients were found to be either frivolous or unwarranted, but the team independently had questions regarding the case management. In three cases, there appears to have been some valid cause for concern.

The present investigation, although much more specific, is the third such review of the Sarnia/Lambton Children's Aid Society since January, 1978. There was also the inquiry by Judge H. Ward Allen, whose report, in November 1982, contained 87 recommendations. Twenty-six of those were directed to Children's Aid Societies in general and most specifically to the Sarnia Society.

All of Judge Allen's recommendations that were specifically directed to the Society have been implemented.

In May, 1981, the Ministry conducted an operational review of the Society. Out of 116 recommendations, 112 have been implemented. Only four remain and are classified as "non-active". These are the recommendations to recruit a Director of Social Service, to establish a Native Group Home on the Indian Reserve, to develop a response to Bill 82 and to develop a plan regarding the Young Offenders Act.

During the course of the present investigation, the team concluded that the Society now is generally well managed, has an active, informed and committed Board, responds quickly and professionally to referrals and co-operates well with other agencies in the community.

The team bases these conclusions on unsolicited comments from professionals representing a variety of agencies. In addition, the Society's in-house solicitor, whose responsibility it is to represent the Society in Court is considered a competent and respected member of the local bar.

The cases in which the team identified weaknesses will continue to be monitored by the Ministry's Regional and Area offices in London and Windsor through the Program Supervisor, who will work with the Board and staff of the Society. The following recommendations have been made to the Children's Aid Society:

1. That the Board implement the "non-active" recommendation of the Operational Review to recruit a well-qualified and experienced Director of Social Services.

2. That the Local Director and Board closely examine with the view of making improvements the decision-making and case planning process within the Children's Services Department.

3. That additional training be provided to Children's Services staff, particularly in regard to the balance of providing professional services to "the triangle" of children, natural parents and foster parents.

4. That the Society provide a more sophisticated form of orientation and training for Board members.

5. That both members of Board and staff be required to swear an oath of confidentiality.

6. That the Society not permit staff to earn extra money by preparing home studies on a private basis.

7. That the Society make an effort to communicate more effectively with the media and the public in general.

THE ROLE OF THE CITY OF SARNIA

The Municipalities in the Province of Ontario are legislated to provide 20% of the funding for the Children's Aid Societies. Section 7(2)(3) of The Child Welfare Act provides for a specific number of municipal representatives to sit on the Societies' Boards of Directors. On the Sarnia/Lambton Children's Aid Society's Board there are two representatives from the City of Sarnia and four from the County of Lambton. From the City, one representative is elected from the Council and one is chosen from the general public.

It is not clear whether the City has a policy and accepted procedure for dealing with a situation in which a City representative assumes an adversarial role vis-a-vis the Organization to which that representative is appointed.

It is imperative that in future members of City Council have a proper appreciation of the difference between the duties and actions of an alderman on behalf of constituents, and the legislative duties and responsibilities of a director of the Children's Aid Society under the Corporations Act and The Child Welfare Act.

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News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DREA RELEASES FINDINGS OF MINISTRY INQUIRY CONCERNING SARNIA CAS

The Minister of Community and Social Services, the Honourable Frank Drea, today released the findings of his ministry's investigation into circumstances surrounding the Sarnia and Lambton Children's Aid Society.

The inquiry followed a recent request by Sarnia Mayor Marceil G. Saddy for the minister's advice on a resolution of the general memberhip of the Sarnia CAS to remove Alderman June Lasenby, the council's appointee on the society's board of directors. The resolution was passed May 31, 1983.

Mr. Drea and his deputy minister, Robert McDonald, released the inquiry findings at a meeting of Sarnia City Council. Council members were given a summary of a confidential report prepared for the deputy minister. Details of the report cannot be released under the confidentiality provisions of The Child Welfare Act.

The inquiry team, headed by John Packer, manager of the ministry's investigations unit, and Britt-Inger James, program supervisor with the ministry's Toronto area office, and an authority on child welfare, spent three weeks in the Sarnia area. Through an agreement with Alderman Lasenby, they reviewed 16 cases by examining files and interviewing clients, community professionals, elected representatives, foster parents, and directors of the CAS -- a total of 37 individuals. Several weeks were spent on follow-up work.

Some complaints were withdrawn and others, of a criminal nature, were referred to the Ontario Provincial Police for investigation.

A confidential 60-page report -- including a comprehensive review of 11 cases -- was submitted to the deputy minister.

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The inquiry team's summary report contained several recommendations regarding the role and activities of Alderman Lasenby on the CAS board of directors and allegations of mismanagement by some clients of the society.

It found Alderman Lasenby's "intervention and inappropriate personal involvement" in the society's investigation and service activities had hampered the society in carrying out its mandate under The Child Welfare Act, and it recommended her immediate removal from the CAS board by Sarnia City Council.

The team found, furthermore, that the amount of time spent by the CAS board of directors in dealing with Alderman Lasenby's allegations of mismanagement had hindered the board in carrying out its normal activities. It recommended that Sarnia City Council develop a procedure to deal with future potential cases of conflict.

Of the 11 cases the team reviewed in detail, it had no concerns about the management of four cases and only very minor concerns regarding communication in two cases. In two cases, the complaints by clients were found to be frivolous or unwarranted, but the team had independent questions about the cases' management. In three cases, the report said, there appears to have been some valid cause for concern.

The team recommended that the Sarnia and Lambton Children's Aid Society appoint a director of social services. It also urged the society to improve its methods of communication with clients, the general public and the news media.

Speaking to the Sarnia City Council today, the minister said he believed there was no need for any further examination of the Sarnia and Lambton CAS, which had been the subject of several ministry reviews as well as a judicial inquiry by Judge H. Ward Allen. Judge Allen's inquiry followed the death in 1976 of a ward of the Sarnia CAS, Kim Anne Popen.

He stressed that the current review team found that at the present time the society is generally well managed, has an active, informed and committed board, responds quickly and professionally to referrals, and co-operates well with other agencies in the community.

"What is required now," the Minister said, "is goodwill toward the society, and close co-operation from other agencies, professionals and the residents of Sarnia in general, so that the society can continue to do its difficult job effectively."

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The minister said that the task of children's aid societies is always "harrowing". In the case of the Sarnia-Lambton community, public confidence in the CAS "became eroded because of the Popen case." Although the society has made "profound and lasting changes" since the death of Kim Anne Popen, "there appears to be a small group in the community who will not accept that positive changes have indeed occurred."

Mr. Drea urged the immediate removal, by the Sarnia City Council, of Alderman Lasenby from the society's board of directors, and the development by council of a procedure to deal with cases of conflict. He also urged the Sarnia CAS to implement the recommendations of the inquiry team.

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